

REL 322: Martyrs and Saints in the Christian Tradition

Syracuse University
Instructor: Virginia Burrus
Fall 2017

This course will focus on the superstars of Christianity—martyrs and ascetic saints—and the literature that made them famous. Neither the idea of suffering as a subversive “witness” nor the investment of certain individuals with “holiness” was a uniquely Christian phenomenon in the Mediterranean cultures of late antiquity in which Christianity emerged. In what senses might martyrdom and sanctity nonetheless be considered distinctly Christian inventions? What kind of power are these martyrs and saints said to display? What kind of body? What kind of spirit? What kind of gender and desire? Is the fateful linking of truth, faithfulness, and creativity with violence, testing, and suffering a holy or an unholy heritage for Christians and others who are called to give witness in current contexts?

The goal of the course is to enable students to think more deeply and critically about the Christian tradition and its continued impact on the present, while also developing skills in writing and textual interpretation. *REL 322 is on the list of approved courses to fulfill the Writing Intensive requirement.*

COURSE BOOK

This course will be centered on readings of primary texts. In most cases, these will be posted on Blackboard; *please print them out and bring them to class*. You are, however, required to purchase one book--*Early Christian Lives*, ed. Carolinne White (Penguin Classic, 1998), which will be available in the SU bookstore.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Faithful attendance and active participation in class discussions. You are expected to attend class regularly and read all assignments carefully. Please come to each class ready to offer a question or comment about an aspect of the ancient texts that you found particularly intriguing; be sure also to bring the ancient texts that we are discussing to class. If you are asked to prepare a brief oral report, in place of responding to readings, do so! Participation will count for 10% of the semester grade. You are allowed two absences without penalty (save them for when you really need them!); beyond that, barring truly exceptional circumstances, each absence will subtract one percentage point from your semester grade (separate from the participation grade).

2. A series of ten one-page papers (roughly 300 words each). Prompts will be provided on Blackboard. Each paper should argue a thesis backed up by evidence from the assigned text(s), appropriately referenced. The papers must be typed (double-spaced) and handed in at the beginning of class on the day they are due; *late papers will not be accepted*. There will be approximately 20 opportunities to write reflection papers; you need only pick 10 of these, but

please do not turn in more than one per week. If you write more than 10 papers, I will count the 10 with the best grades. The short papers will, cumulatively, count for 25% of the semester grade.

3. **One oral exam** (30 minutes), to be scheduled on the morning of Wednesday, October 4, or Friday, October 6, covering the topic of martyrdom. A study guide will be provided on Blackboard. 10% of the semester grade.

4. **One “current event” article posted** on a designated day during the second half of the semester, with a brief comment on its relevance to our topics. 5% of the semester grade.

3. **Two longer essays.** Instructions will be provided on Blackboard. The first essay (about 4 pages, or 1000-1250 words) will involve a close analysis of one martyrdom text; it will account for 20% of the semester grade. The second essay, in two parts (about 6 pages, or 1500-1750 words), will involve comparative and/or integrative analyses of the Lives of Saints; it will account for 30% of the semester grade. Exams must be typed (double-spaced) and emailed as a Word doc file before midnight on the day they are due, i.e., October 10 and December 12, respectively; *late exams will not be accepted.*

ACADEMIC COURTESY

All students are expected to follow simple rules of academic courtesy to fellow students and instructor. This includes being prepared for class, attending class from beginning to end, listening when another speaks, respecting personal and intellectual differences, and generally abstaining from any actions not productively related to this course; electronic devices such as computers, tablets, and cell phones must be turned off and stowed away. Anyone whose behavior deviates from these standards may, at the discretion of the instructor, be asked to leave class for the day and will be counted absent.

TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

**Note that in addition to the readings listed here, “current event” articles will also be posted on Blackboard and should be considered part of the assigned reading.*

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| T, 8/29 | Roman imperial cult and culture: spectacles of violence |
| Th, 8/31 | Persecution as policy and process
--James B. Rives, <i>Religion in the Roman Empire</i> (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 196-200 (B)
--Correspondence of Governor Pliny and Emperor Trajan (B)
-- <i>The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs</i> (B) |
| T, 9/5 | Greek traditions of noble death
--Plato, <i>Apology of Socrates</i> (B)
--Justin, <i>Second Apology</i> 10 (B) |

- Th, 9/7 Jewish traditions of noble death
 --Daniel 3, 6 (NRSV) (B)
 --4 Maccabees 4:15-end (NRSV) (B)
- T, 9/12 Early Christian writings: Jesus as martyr
 --Burton Mack, *The Christian Myth* (NY: Continuum, 2003), pp. 41-42, 58 (B)
 --1 Corinthians 15 (NRSV) (B)
 --Luke 22-23 (NRSV) (B)
 --Acts 6:7-8:2 (NRSV) (B)
- Th, 9/14 Anticipating martyrdom
 --"Ignatius," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (NY: Garland, 1990), pp 451-452
 --Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans* (B)
 --Ignatius, *Letter to Polycarp* (B)
- T, 9/19 Birth of a literary genre
 --"Polycarp," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (NY: Garland, 1990), pp 742-743 (B)
 --*Martyrdom of Polycarp* (B)
- Th, 9/21 Witness of the weak
 --*Letter of the Martyrs of Vienne and Lyons* (B)
- T, 9/26 Dreaming martyrdom
 --*Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (B)
- Th, 9/28 The stuff of legend
 --*Acts of Paul and Thecla* (B)
- T, 10/3 Review of martyrdom
- Oral exams Wed and Fri, 10/4 and 10/6***
- Th, 10/5 Campus art tour (sign up for report!)
- T, 10/10 End of persecution and rise of asceticism (no reflection paper due)
 --Carolinne White, "General Introduction," *Early Christian Lives* (ECL), xi-xliv
- First longer essay assignment due***
- Th, 10/12 --Life of Constantine (B)

- T, 10/17 Birth of a literary genre
--Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, ECL, 3-36
- Th, 10/19 --*Life of Antony*, ECL, 36-70
- T, 10/24 Competing for sanctity
--Jerome, *Life of Paul*, ECL, 73-84
- Th, 10/26 --Jerome, *Life of Malchus*, ECL, 119-128
- T, 10/31 Soldier saint
--Sulpicius Severus, *Life of Martin*, ELC, 131-159
- Th, 11/2 The first female saint's life
--Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina* (B)
- T, 11/7 Illness and sanctity
--*Life of Syncletica*, pp. 265-287 (B)
- Th, 11/9 -- *Life of Syncletica*, pp. 287-311 (B)
- T, 11/14 Transvestite saint
--*Life of Pelagia of Antioch* (B)
- Th, 11/16 Harlot saint
--*Life of Mary of Egypt* (B)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

- T, 11/28 The cult of saints and relics
--readings t.b.a.
- Th, 11/30 The cult of saints and icons
--readings t.b.a.
- T, 12/5 Your saints: student presentations
- Th, 12/7 Wrap-up
- T, 12/12 *Second longer essay assignment due*

ABSENCE DUE TO OBSERVANCE OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Syracuse University does not have non-instructional days for the observance of any religious holiday. However, we will provide an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirement that is missed because of an absence due to a religious observance, provided the instructor has been notified no later than the end of the second week of classes.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), located at 804 University Avenue, Room 309; call 315-443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters. Students should submit a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, it is crucial to contact ODS and plan for accommodations as early as possible. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as university policy. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

In this course, the minimal penalty for any student found to cheat on an assignment is an F for that assignment; major violations will result in course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of Academic Integrity Policy; repeat offenses can result in even more serious sanctions.

